

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

(DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2014-0005 EA)

Project Name: C Ditch/Needle Rock Pipeline Project, Delta County, Colorado

Location: 6th Principal Meridian, Colorado, T. 15 S., R. 91 W., Sec. 17: SW1/4SW1/4, Sec. 18: SW1/4SE1/4, Sec. 19: N1/2NE1/4 and T. 15 S., R. 92 W., Sec. 24: N1/2NW1/4.

Applicant: C Ditch Company through the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, for the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

Background

BLM is adopting an EA completed by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), titled “C Ditch/Needle Rock Pipeline Project, Delta County, Colorado”, BOR FONSI dated 11/4/2013.

The C Ditch Company was awarded a funding agreement by BOR through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act to replace approximately 2.78 miles (including private and public land) of open irrigation ditch with a buried pipeline. Piping the water would improve the efficiency of water delivery to C Ditch Company members and would also reduce salinity loading in the Colorado River Basin. The C Ditch Company prepared a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for BOR which analyzed the potential impacts and benefits of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives.

BOR and BLM reviewed the draft EA in July 2013, and provided comments. After revisions were made, BOR notified interested agencies, individuals and organizations that the draft EA was available and provided a 10-day comment period. See Exhibit C, BOR’s EA notification and mailing list. BOR has provided the final EA and their FONSI to BLM.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the C Ditch/Needle Rock Pipeline Project EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action with “Environmental Commitments and Mitigation Measures” will not have a significant effect on the human environment.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The proposed action is located approximately 2 miles north of Crawford, and would pipe an existing irrigation ditch. BLM would issue a 30 year right-of-way authorization under FLPMA for an irrigation pipeline, screen box inlet and existing access road, totaling approximately 3.426 acres on public land. Additionally BLM would issue a short term, FLPMA right-of-way for construction purposes only, that would expire December 31, 2015, for additional temporary construction space along the eastern end of the buried pipeline and allow a staging area. The short term right-of-way would total approximately 4.006 acres on public land.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Beneficial impacts of the proposed action include an estimated salt load reduction in the Colorado River Basin of 1,306 tons per year as well as increased water delivery to the C Ditch members. Adverse impacts include temporary, short term impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitat, increased traffic and noise during the construction phase and temporary surface disturbance. After the pipeline is constructed the disturbed areas, including the staging area, will be reclaimed and reseeded. The access road is an existing road, historically used by multiple ditch companies within this area.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

The nature and scale of this project, the short term duration of construction, and the stipulations attached to the right-of-way would result in low risk to public health and safety.

3) Unique Characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no identified parklands, Wild and Scenic Rivers or natural wetlands within the vicinity of the project area.

Historic and Cultural: A Class III cultural inventory was conducted and the inventory resulted in the recordation of C Ditch. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was developed between BOR and the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with the BLM and C Ditch Company participating as consulting parties. Mitigation required that photographic documentation be conducted to capture the historic landscape characteristics of the ditch prior to construction of the pipeline.

Prime Farmlands: Construction of the pipeline will temporarily disturb agriculturally important lands. However the lands will be returned to production immediately following construction and reclamation of the pipeline. The constructed pipeline would allow C Ditch members the ability to better manage their water rights through efficiencies gained from piping the open ditch which could result in a longer irrigation season and potentially increased agricultural productivity.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The piping of open ditches within the Colorado River Basin has not been viewed as a controversial issue. Instead these types of projects are viewed as beneficial due to the reduction of salt loading in the basin and increased water efficiency for the ditch users.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Projects such as this, which pipe open ditches, are very common within the region. Both BOR and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) frequently design and/or help fund these types of projects due to the long term benefits.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action does not set a precedent for future piping projects. As mentioned above, BOR and NRCS are mandated to fund similar projects because of their long term benefits. All future proposals would require NEPA and be evaluated on their own merits.

7) Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Other developments in the area are foreseeable, but it is not anticipated that cumulative impacts of any significance would occur. The limited scale of short term activity and surface disturbance creates minimal individual impacts and minimal cumulative effects when added to the existing environment.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

A Class III cultural inventory was conducted, SHPO was consulted and mitigation measures were applied to the project in accordance with the MOA between BOR and SHPO. See Number 3 above.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.

A threatened and endangered species inventory was completed and no threatened, endangered or candidate species were found within the project area.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action does not threaten a violation of any laws or regulations imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the proposed action is in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan; and 3) the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Approved:

/s/ Jerry Strahan

Jerry Strahan
Acting Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

November 20, 2013

Date